# The Tanzimat Reforms: Modernization, Desperation, and the Transformation of the Ottoman Empire

## I. Introduction: The Ottoman Empire at a Crossroads

### A. Overview of the Tanzimat Era (1839-1876)

The Tanzimat, a Turkish term meaning "Reorganization" or "Auspicious Reorderings" (Tanzimat-i Hayriye), denotes a critical period of intensive legislative and administrative reform within the Ottoman Empire, officially spanning from 1839 to 1876.[1] This era, unfolding under the reigns of Sultans Abdülmecid I (1839–1861) and Abdülaziz (1861–1876), represented a determined effort by the Ottoman ruling elite to modernize the state and society in the face of profound internal and external challenges.[1] The reforms were heavily influenced by contemporary European ideas and sought to fundamentally alter the empire from an old order, perceived as being based on theocratic principles, to a modern state capable of surviving in an increasingly competitive international environment.[2] The formal commencement of the Tanzimat is marked by the promulgation of the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane (Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber) in 1839, and its conventional end is associated with the proclamation of the first Ottoman Constitution in 1876 and the subsequent accession of Sultan Abdülhamid II.[4]

The choice of the term "Auspicious Reorderings" was not accidental. It was a deliberate attempt by the Ottoman leadership to frame these sweeping, and potentially unsettling, changes in a positive and traditionally resonant light. The word "Hayriye" (auspicious) had historical connotations within the Ottoman political lexicon, often linked to significant state-led initiatives aimed at beneficial transformations, most notably the "Vaka-i Hayriye" (Auspicious Incident), the term used for the violent dissolution of the Janissary corps in 1826.[5] By employing such terminology, the state sought to garner internal legitimacy for a reform program that, while essential for survival, drew heavily on foreign models and threatened established interests.[1] This careful framing underscored an awareness of potential conservative resistance and the imperative to present the reforms as being in the best interests of the Ottoman state and its people, even as they mirrored European precedents.

### B. The "Sick Man of Europe": Pre-Tanzimat Socio-Political and Economic Conditions

By the early 19th century, the Ottoman Empire, once a dominant global power, was facing a multifaceted crisis that led European observers to label it the "Sick Man of Europe." This decline was the product of deep-seated internal weaknesses and mounting external

pressures.

1. Internal Weaknesses: Decentralization, Corruption, Military Decline
   The central authority of the Sultan had significantly eroded over preceding centuries. By the early 1800s, direct imperial rule over many provinces had become nominal, with local landowning magnates, known as derebeys or ayan, wielding considerable power and often defying directives from Istanbul.7 This decentralization severely hampered the state's ability to effectively collect taxes, enforce laws, and implement unified policies.7 Corruption was rampant within the administrative structures, further undermining governance and public trust.6
   Militarily, the once-feared Janissary corps had degenerated into an undisciplined, politically meddlesome, and ineffective force that actively resisted modernization efforts.6 Their opposition was a major impediment to military reform until Sultan Mahmud II decisively abolished the corps in 1826.5 This event was a crucial, albeit violent, precursor to the more systematic reforms of the Tanzimat period.
2. External Pressures: European Imperialism and the "Eastern Question"
   The Ottoman Empire suffered a series of debilitating military defeats at the hands of ascendant European powers, particularly Russia, throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries.2 These defeats resulted in significant territorial losses and starkly exposed the Empire's military and technological lag. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, following a disastrous war with Russia, and Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, were particularly traumatic events that underscored the Empire's vulnerability.4 These crises intensified the "Eastern Question," the diplomatic conundrum faced by European powers regarding the anticipated disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent fate of its vast territories.4 The constant meddling and competing interests of Great Britain, France, Russia, and Austria-Hungary placed immense pressure on the Ottoman government, often forcing its hand in policy matters.
3. Rise of Nationalism within the Empire
   The ideals of nationalism, largely emanating from post-revolutionary Europe, began to permeate the diverse ethnic and religious communities within the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century.6 This burgeoning national consciousness, particularly potent in the Balkan provinces, posed a direct challenge to the traditional multi-ethnic, multi-religious fabric of the Empire. The Serbian Revolution (1804-1817) and the Greek War of Independence (1821-1829), which resulted in the creation of autonomous Serbia and an independent Greek kingdom respectively, were stark manifestations of this trend.6 The Ottoman millet system, which had historically provided a framework for the self-governance of religious minorities, found itself increasingly unable to contain these new ethno-nationalist aspirations.6
4. Economic Challenges: Free Trade, Public Debt, Deindustrialization
   The Ottoman economy faced severe structural problems. A series of capitulations granted to European powers over centuries, and more formalized commercial treaties such as the Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Convention of 1838 (Treaty of Balta Liman), had established liberal trade policies that effectively opened Ottoman markets to unrestricted foreign imports with low tariffs.6 While praised by some contemporary

European economists, these policies are argued by many historians to have contributed to the decline of indigenous Ottoman industries, which could not compete with cheaper European manufactured goods, leading to deindustrialization.6

The financial situation was further exacerbated by the costs of war and early, unsystematic reform attempts. The Crimean War (1853-1856) compelled the Empire to take its first significant foreign loans in 1854.6 This marked the beginning of a rapid accumulation of public debt owed to European financiers. By 1875, the Ottoman state was forced to declare bankruptcy.6 This default led to the establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA) in 1881, an institution controlled by European creditors that took over the collection and administration of key Ottoman revenues to service the debt, representing a profound infringement on Ottoman sovereignty.6

The pre-Tanzimat economic policies, particularly the capitulatory regime and the adherence to liberal trade agreements often signed under duress or in exchange for diplomatic support, created a fundamental economic vulnerability. This vulnerability meant that the Ottoman state entered the Tanzimat era with a weakened capacity for internal revenue generation, making it heavily reliant on foreign loans to finance the ambitious modernization projects, including infrastructure and military reforms. This reliance, in turn, often came with strings attached, leading to further economic concessions and deepening foreign influence, creating a cycle of debt and dependency that the Tanzimat reforms struggled to break and, in some respects, intensified.

## C. Early Reform Efforts: The Legacy of Selim III and Mahmud II

The Tanzimat reforms did not emerge from a vacuum. They were built upon earlier attempts at modernization initiated by Sultans Selim III (r. 1789–1807) and, more significantly, Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839).4 Selim III's Nizam-ı Cedid (New Order) reforms, primarily focused on military modernization, were largely thwarted by Janissary opposition, leading to his overthrow and assassination.6

Mahmud II's reign, however, proved to be a pivotal period that laid much of the groundwork for the Tanzimat.1 He fundamentally altered the traditional Ottoman concept of reform from merely attempting to restore old institutions to actively creating new ones based on contemporary needs and, increasingly, European models.1 His most dramatic and consequential act was the abolition of the Janissary corps in 1826, an event known as the Vaka-i Hayriye (Auspicious Incident).5 This removed a major bastion of conservative resistance to change.

Following this, Mahmud II embarked on creating a new, European-style army (the Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye), reforming administrative structures, and beginning the process of centralizing state power.6 He sought to curtail the autonomy of powerful provincial notables (Pashas and derebeys) and extend the reach of the central government.6 He also initiated reforms in education, clothing (introducing the fez), and the bureaucracy, and made efforts to bring vakıf (religious endowment) revenues under state administration.6

Mahmud II's actions, particularly the violent suppression of the Janissaries and his initial moves towards administrative centralization and the reassertion of sultanic authority over entrenched local interests, were indispensable, if harsh, precursors to the more

comprehensive and legally articulated reforms of the Tanzimat. Without dismantling these powerful traditionalist forces and expanding the conceptual and practical scope of state power, the broad societal and administrative restructuring envisioned by the Tanzimat statesmen would have faced insurmountable obstacles from the outset. The Tanzimat reformers, therefore, inherited a political landscape that, while still fraught with challenges, had been partially cleared of its most formidable internal impediments to change.

# II. The Genesis and Drivers of the Tanzimat Reforms

## A. Primary Motivations: Modernization, Centralization, and Imperial Preservation

The primary impetus behind the Tanzimat reforms was the urgent need to preserve the Ottoman Empire from collapse and ensure its survival in a rapidly changing global order.[2] Ottoman statesmen recognized that the Empire's traditional military, administrative, and social structures were no longer adequate to meet the challenges posed by European military superiority, economic penetration, and the rise of internal nationalist movements. Modernization across various sectors—military, legal, educational, and administrative—was thus seen as an existential necessity, a means to strengthen the state and enable it to compete on more equal terms with the European powers.[1]

A core component of this modernization strategy was the centralization of power.[1] The reformers aimed to reassert the authority of the Sublime Porte (the central Ottoman government) over the provinces, diminish the influence of autonomous local notables who had long fragmented imperial control, and create a more standardized and efficient administrative system.[6] This involved building an efficient bureaucracy, staffed by educated and salaried officials, and establishing a uniform legal framework that would apply throughout the Empire.[7] Furthermore, the reforms were driven by a desire to foster a new sense of common identity and loyalty among the Empire's diverse religious and ethnic populations. The ideology of Ottomanism, which promoted the idea of equal citizenship for all subjects regardless of creed or origin, was intended to counteract the centrifugal forces of ethnic nationalism that threatened to tear the Empire apart, particularly in its European provinces.[5] By guaranteeing rights and security to non-Muslims, the reformers hoped to secure their allegiance and prevent further foreign intervention on their behalf.

## B. The Influence of European Ideas and Powers

The intellectual and political currents of 19th-century Europe profoundly influenced the Tanzimat reforms. Ottoman reformers, many of whom had been educated in or had served as diplomats in Western Europe, were exposed to Enlightenment ideas, the principles of the French Revolution (such as the rights of man and citizen), and the structures of modern European nation-states.[2] These models provided inspiration for the reorganization of Ottoman administration, law, education, and military. The adoption of French legal codes, the Prussian conscript system, and European styles of urban planning are clear examples of this influence.[2]

Beyond ideological influence, the European Great Powers—Britain, France, and Russia in particular—played a direct and often coercive role in shaping the Tanzimat. Their motivations were mixed, ranging from genuine humanitarian concern for Christian minorities and a desire to see a "modernized" and stable Ottoman Empire, to strategic geopolitical interests related to the "Eastern Question" and the pursuit of commercial advantages.[3] European powers frequently pressured the Ottoman government to enact specific reforms, especially those guaranteeing the rights, property, and security of its Christian subjects.[3] The timing of major reform edicts often coincided with moments of Ottoman weakness or when the Empire sought European diplomatic or military support, such as during the conflict with Muhammad Ali of Egypt or in the aftermath of the Crimean War.[3] This external pressure, while contributing to the reform agenda, also fueled resentment within the Empire and raised questions about the true extent of Ottoman sovereignty.

The Tanzimat reforms, therefore, emerged from a complex interaction between Ottoman agency and European influence. Ottoman reformers were not merely passive recipients of Western dictates; they actively engaged with European ideas and models, selectively adopting and adapting them to serve what they perceived as the primary Ottoman interest: the preservation and strengthening of the imperial state. This was a pragmatic response to both internal crises and external pressures. The reformers utilized European concepts and structures as tools for Ottoman state-building and centralization. The very act of framing reforms within traditional Islamic discourse, as seen in the preamble of the Gülhane Edict which attributed the Empire's problems to deviations from sacred law [5], while simultaneously introducing secular legal codes and notions of equality [2], demonstrates a deliberate strategy. This approach aimed to secure internal legitimacy by appealing to traditional values, while also meeting external demands and the imperatives of modernization. The goal was not necessarily wholesale Westernization for its own sake, but rather the selective appropriation of Western methods to achieve Ottoman objectives.

## C. Key Ottoman Reformers and Their Vision

The Tanzimat was spearheaded by a new generation of Ottoman sultans and statesmen, many of whom were Western-educated or had extensive experience in Europe.

1. Sultans: Abdülmecid I (1839–1861) and Abdülaziz (1861–1876)
   The reigns of these two sultans encompassed the entirety of the Tanzimat period.1 They provided the crucial imperial sanction and the political context within which the reforms could proceed.
   Sultan Abdülmecid I ascended the throne at the young age of sixteen, just as the Empire faced a severe crisis with Muhammad Ali of Egypt.1 He was reportedly receptive to the advice of reform-minded ministers, most notably Mustafa Reşid Paşa, and was committed to continuing the modernization efforts initiated by his father, Mahmud II.1 It was under Abdülmecid I that the two foundational edicts of the Tanzimat, the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane (1839) and the Hatt-ı Hümayun (1856), were proclaimed.28
   Sultan Abdülaziz, who succeeded his brother, initially continued the reform process.1 However, his later reign was marked by increasing autocracy, financial mismanagement,

and a growing disillusionment with the reforms, contributing to their stagnation by the mid-1870s.2 The concentration of power in the Sultan's hands, itself a product of earlier Tanzimat centralization efforts, ironically made it difficult to counter his later revisionary policies.2

2. Statesmen:
   A cadre of influential bureaucrats and diplomats, often referred to as the "Tanzimat men," were the primary architects and implementers of the reforms.
   - **Mustafa Reşid Paşa (1800-1858):** Widely regarded as the father of the Tanzimat, Reşid Paşa was a dominant figure in its early phase.[2] Having served as ambassador to Paris and London, he was deeply impressed by European institutions and became a fervent advocate for Westernizing reforms.[29] He played the leading role in drafting and proclaiming the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane.[29] During his six terms as Grand Vizier, he championed numerous reforms, including the introduction of new commercial and criminal codes, administrative reorganization, and the abolition of the slave trade.[29]
   - **Mehmed Emin Âli Paşa (1815-1871):** Along with Fuat Paşa, Âli Paşa dominated the later stages of the Tanzimat.[4] He served as Grand Vizier five times and Foreign Minister seven times.[34] A skilled diplomat, he was instrumental in formulating the Hatt-ı Hümayun of 1856 and navigating the complex international relations of the era, particularly after the Crimean War.[34] He was a strong proponent of Ottomanism, advocating for the equality of all subjects and the secularization of the state and education. However, he was also known for his autocratic tendencies and distrust of parliamentary institutions, which brought him into conflict with emerging liberal groups like the Young Ottomans.[34] His death in 1871 is often considered a turning point that weakened the reform movement.[4]
   - **Keçecizade Fuat Paşa (1814-1869):** A close associate of Âli Paşa, Fuat Paşa also played a crucial role in the Tanzimat.[5] He served as Grand Vizier twice and held other important ministerial posts.[35] Educated in medicine and fluent in French, he had a distinguished diplomatic career before becoming a leading reformer.[35] Fuat Paşa was particularly involved in financial and provincial administration reforms, including the Provincial Regulation of 1858, and favored a French-inspired civil code.[35] Like Âli Paşa, he was a proponent of Ottomanism and modernization.[35]
   - **Ahmed Cevdet Pasha (1822-1895):** A distinguished Islamic scholar, historian, jurist, and statesman, Cevdet Pasha represented a more conservative wing of the reform movement.[37] While recognizing the need for modernization, he sought to ground reforms in Islamic tradition and law.[37] His most significant contribution was heading the commission that drafted the *Mecelle-i Ahkâm-ı Adliyye* (Ottoman Civil Code), a codification of Hanafi jurisprudence for use in the new secular courts.[37] He also served as Minister of Justice and governor of several provinces, and authored influential historical works.[37]

The Tanzimat was largely propelled by this relatively small circle of bureaucratic elites. These

individuals, while united by the overarching goal of imperial preservation through modernization, held diverse perspectives on the appropriate balance between Westernization and indigenous traditions, especially concerning the role of Islamic law. Mustafa Reşid Paşa, Âli Paşa, and Fuat Paşa were generally more inclined to adopt European legal and administrative models directly.[2] In contrast, Ahmed Cevdet Pasha championed the *Mecelle*, an ambitious project to codify Islamic civil law for application in modern courts, reflecting a desire to modernize within an Islamic framework.[37] This internal tension among the reformers themselves—a debate between more secular, Western-oriented approaches and attempts to synthesize modernity with Islamic tradition—contributed to the sometimes eclectic and even contradictory nature of the reforms. The simultaneous pursuit of secular codes directly inspired by Europe and the codification of Sharia for civil matters illustrates that the Tanzimat was not a monolithic push towards Westernization but a dynamic and contested process of adaptation, shaped by the varied intellectual currents and ideological commitments of its principal architects.

# III. The Cornerstones of Reform: Key Edicts and Legislation

The Tanzimat era was characterized by a flurry of legislative activity, as the Ottoman state sought to redefine its relationship with its subjects and modernize its institutions. Two imperial edicts stand out as foundational documents, supplemented by a host of specific laws targeting various sectors.

## A. The Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane (Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber, 1839): Promises and Provisions

Proclaimed by Sultan Abdülmecid I on November 3, 1839, in the Gülhane Park in Istanbul, and largely drafted and read by Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Paşa, the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane is universally recognized as the formal inauguration of the Tanzimat period.[2] This decree laid out a broad program of reform, making several key promises:

1. **Guarantees of Life, Property, and Honor:** The edict pledged to ensure the security of life, honor, and property for all Ottoman subjects, irrespective of their religion or race.[2] This was a significant departure, as it aimed to establish a form of legal equality and protect individuals from arbitrary actions by state officials. Specific provisions included the right to a public trial before any execution, the inviolability of personal honor, and the protection of property, stipulating that the innocent heirs of a criminal would not be deprived of their legal rights, nor would the criminal's property be confiscated.[16]
2. **Taxation and Conscription Reforms:** The edict addressed two major sources of popular discontent and administrative inefficiency: taxation and military conscription. It called for the establishment of a regular and equitable system for assessing and levying taxes, based on the fortune and means of each subject, and explicitly aimed for the abolition of the abusive tax-farming (*iltizam*) system.[2] Furthermore, it promised an equally regular system for the conscription of troops, with a fixed duration of military

service (proposed at four or five years) to lessen the burden on the populace and the disruption to agriculture and commerce.[2]

3. **Beginnings of Legal Secularization and Bureaucratic Expansion:** While the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane was carefully worded to appear consistent with Islamic principles, often referencing "divine law" or the "sacred text of our law" [5], it marked the beginning of a process of legal secularization. It called for the drafting of new laws, including a penal code, by councils of state, signifying a move towards state-centered legislation that would supplement, and in some areas potentially supersede, traditional Sharia interpretations.[16] The implementation of these reforms necessitated an expansion of the state bureaucracy, with officials to be paid regular salaries, and an effort to improve the efficiency of the state by reforming its relationship with its subjects to be more direct and unmediated.[16]

The Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane was a masterclass in political communication, strategically employing the rhetoric of Islamic legal tradition to introduce and legitimize concepts that were fundamentally modern and, in some aspects, secular. The document's repeated references to Sharia and the sacred law [16] were clearly intended to mollify conservative elements within the Empire, particularly the ulema, and to frame the reforms not as a break from tradition but as a return to its pure principles or a necessary evolution. However, the core commitments—guaranteeing the life, property, and honor of *all* subjects regardless of religious affiliation [2], ensuring public trials, and establishing fixed and fair taxation—were revolutionary for their time and place, echoing the liberal ideals of 19th-century Europe. The call for new laws and a penal code to be formulated by state councils [16] also signaled a significant shift towards a state-driven legislative process, moving beyond the exclusive domain of traditional religious jurisprudence. This careful balancing act between tradition and modernity reveals the reformers' astute understanding of the need to package transformative ideas in familiar, legitimizing language to navigate the complex socio-political terrain of the Ottoman Empire.

## B. The Hatt-ı Hümayun (Imperial Reform Edict / Islahat Fermanı, 1856): Extending Equality

Issued by Sultan Abdülmecid I on February 18, 1856, the Hatt-ı Hümayun (often referred to as the Islahat Fermanı or Reform Edict) was a direct extension and reaffirmation of the principles laid out in the Gülhane Edict.[2] Its promulgation was heavily influenced by the European powers (Britain, France, and Austria) in the context of the Treaty of Paris, which concluded the Crimean War.[24] The edict was primarily focused on clarifying and expanding the rights of the Empire's non-Muslim subjects.

1. **Provisions for Non-Muslims and the Millet System:** The Hatt-ı Hümayun promised full legal equality for non-Muslims in all aspects of civic life, including education, government appointments, the administration of justice, eligibility for military service (or payment of an exemption tax), and taxation.[2] It explicitly guaranteed freedom of religion and the right of non-Muslim communities (*millets*) to repair and build churches, schools,

and hospitals, and to manage their communal affairs.[7] The edict also mandated the reorganization of the millet structures, including the participation of lay members in their administration.[7]

2. **Abolition of Jizya and Equality in Public Service and Education:** A key provision was the formal abolition of the *jizya*, the traditional poll tax levied on non-Muslims.[7] In practice, this was often substituted by a military exemption tax known as the *bedel-i askeri*, as non-Muslims were generally reluctant to perform military service and the state also had reservations.[7] The edict reaffirmed the principle of non-discrimination in employment in the civil service and guaranteed access for all subjects to civil and military schools, based on merit and ability.[7]

The Hatt-ı Hümayun of 1856, while aiming to foster Ottomanism through legal equality, had the unintended consequence of further institutionalizing and, in some ways, solidifying communal distinctions. By mandating the reorganization of the millets and the drafting of state-sanctioned communal constitutions or regulations (*Nizamnames*)—such as the Armenian National Constitution of 1863, the Greek Orthodox General Regulations of 1862, and the Jewish *Hahamhane Nizamnamesi* of 1865 [44]—the Ottoman state provided these communities with formal, legally recognized platforms. These platforms, often involving elected lay councils, allowed for the articulation of distinct communal interests and, over time, facilitated the expression of national identities. Thus, a measure designed for integration paradoxically equipped minority communities with more robust structures for defining and pursuing their particular aspirations, especially when the promised equality was perceived as incompletely delivered or when external nationalist ideologies gained traction.

## C. Other Significant Legislative Measures:

Beyond the two major imperial edicts, the Tanzimat era witnessed the promulgation of numerous laws aimed at modernizing various aspects of Ottoman state and society.

**Table 1: Key Legislative Acts of the Tanzimat Era**

| Year | Name of Law/Edict (Turkish and English) | Issuing Sultan / Key Proponent(s) | Summary of Key Provisions |
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| 1839 | Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane (Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber) | Abdülmecid I / Mustafa Reşid Paşa | Guarantees of life, property, honor; fair taxation & conscription; public trials; beginnings of legal secularization. [16] |
| 1840, 1858 | Ceza Kanunname-i Hümayunu (Ottoman Penal Code) | Abdülmecid I / Reformist Statesmen | Based on French models; standardized criminal law and procedure; 1858 code included decriminalization of |

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| | | | homosexuality but stated non-repeal of Sharia. [2] |
| 1850 | Ticaret Kanunnamesi (Ottoman Commercial Code) | Abdülmecid I / Reformist Statesmen | Largely modeled on French Commercial Code; regulated land trade, contracts, bankruptcy; addressed interest in commercial dealings. [2] |
| 1856 | Hatt-ı Hümayun / Islahat Fermanı (Imperial Reform Edict) | Abdülmecid I / Mehmed Emin Âli Paşa, Mustafa Reşid Paşa | Full equality for non-Muslims (rights, military service, taxation, education, public office); abolition of jizya; reorganization of millets. [30] |
| 1858 | Arazi Kanunnamesi (Ottoman Land Code) | Abdülmecid I / Reformist Statesmen | Regulated land tenure; extended rights of transfer, sale, inheritance; blurred lines between state (miri) and private (mülk) land, facilitating private ownership. [46] |
| 1863 | Ticaret-i Bahriye Kanunnamesi (Ottoman Maritime Commerce Code) | Abdülaziz / Reformist Statesmen | Modeled on French law; regulated maritime trade, ship ownership, freight contracts, passenger rights. [22] |
| 1864, 1867 | Vilayet Nizamnamesi (Provincial Law) | Abdülaziz / Midhat Paşa, Fuat Paşa, Âli Paşa | Reorganized provincial administration into vilayets, sanjaks, kazas, etc.; defined roles of governors (Vali) and administrative councils. [59] |
| 1869 | Tabiyet-i Osmaniye Kanunnamesi (Ottoman Nationality Law) | Abdülaziz / Reformist Statesmen | Defined Ottoman citizenship based on jus sanguinis, jus soli, and naturalization; prohibited dual |

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| | | | nationality; aimed to counter capitulations. [60] |
| 1869-1876 | Mecelle-i Ahkâm-ı Adliyye (Ottoman Civil Code) | Abdülaziz / Ahmed Cevdet Pasha | Codification of Hanafi Islamic law for civil transactions (contracts, obligations, property, procedure); used in Nizamiye courts. [37] |

1. **Ottoman Penal Code (1840, revised 1851, new code 1858):** The Ottoman state made several attempts to modernize its criminal justice system. Early penal codes were introduced in 1840 and 1851. A more comprehensive Penal Code was promulgated in 1858, heavily influenced by French and other European legal traditions.[2] This code aimed to standardize punishments, introduce principles of due process, and further the secularization of law. Notably, the 1858 code included the decriminalization of homosexuality.[8] However, it also contained a clause stating that it would not repeal the provisions of Sharia law, which led to a complex dual legal environment and potential for conflicting interpretations.[26]
2. **Ottoman Commercial Code (Ticaret Kanunnamesi, 1850) and Maritime Commerce Code (Ticaret-i Bahriye Kanunnamesi, 1863):** To facilitate growing international trade and provide a legal framework acceptable to European merchants, the Ottomans adopted commercial codes largely based on French models.[2] The Commercial Code of 1850 was the first Ottoman legal text directly adopted from a foreign source (the French Commercial Code of 1807) and adapted for Ottoman use.[53] It covered areas such as contracts, partnerships, bills of exchange, and bankruptcy. A contentious issue was the regulation of interest (*faiz* or *guzishta*) in commercial transactions, which, while problematic from a strict Sharia perspective, was deemed essential for modern commerce and was incorporated into the code.[53] The Maritime Commerce Code of 1863 similarly drew on French law to regulate shipping, freight, insurance, and other aspects of maritime trade, including the rights and responsibilities of passengers and carriers.[22]
3. The Mecelle (Ottoman Civil Code, Majallat al-Ahkam al-Adliyyah, 1869-1876): This was arguably one of the most significant legal achievements of the Tanzimat era. It represented a monumental effort to codify parts of the Hanafi school of Islamic law, primarily concerning civil transactions (mu'amalat), into a modern, systematic legal code.16 Drafted by a commission headed by the scholar-statesman Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, the Mecelle comprised 1851 articles covering topics such as sale, lease, surety, agency, and rules of evidence.39 Its purpose was to provide a clear, accessible, and authoritative body of civil law based on Islamic principles for use in the newly established secular Nizamiye courts, especially in cases involving Muslims or where Sharia was deemed applicable.22 The Mecelle was a unique attempt to reconcile Islamic legal tradition with the modern state's need for a codified and predictable legal system.

It remained influential in many successor states of the Ottoman Empire for decades. The simultaneous development and application of Western-inspired secular codes in areas like criminal and commercial law, alongside the Sharia-derived Mecelle for civil transactions, underscores a fundamental characteristic of Tanzimat legal reform. It was not a straightforward or wholesale adoption of European secular law, nor was it a rigid adherence to traditional Islamic jurisprudence. Instead, the Ottoman state pursued a pragmatic, and at times seemingly contradictory, path of legal pluralism. This approach reflected an attempt to meet the practical demands of modernization, particularly in facilitating international commerce and satisfying European expectations, while also striving to maintain Islamic legitimacy and accommodate the conservative socio-legal fabric of the empire. This created a complex legal landscape where different sources of law and judicial instances coexisted, sometimes leading to jurisdictional ambiguities but also allowing for a degree of flexibility in a society undergoing profound transformation.

4. **Ottoman Land Code (Arazi Kanunnamesi, 1858):** This law aimed to clarify and regulate the complex system of land tenure in the Empire.[46] It defined various categories of land, including state land (*miri*), private land (*mülk*), and waqf land. A key impact of the Land Code was the extension of rights related to the transfer, sale, and inheritance of *miri* land, effectively blurring the lines between state ownership and de facto private ownership for those who cultivated the land for extended periods.[55] It also facilitated the registration of land titles, aiming to increase agricultural productivity and tax revenues. However, its implementation often had unintended consequences, sometimes leading to the concentration of land in the hands of powerful notables or the displacement of small cultivators. The Land Code's provisions had a lasting legacy, influencing land law in many post-Ottoman states, including those in the Balkans like Bulgaria.[55]
5. Ottoman Nationality Law (Tabiyet-i Osmaniye Kanunnamesi, 1869): This was the Empire's first comprehensive legislation defining Ottoman citizenship (tabiyet).60 It marked a significant step towards establishing a secular, state-defined concept of nationality, moving away from the purely religious distinctions that had previously characterized subjecthood. The law incorporated principles of both jus sanguinis (citizenship by descent, primarily through the father) and jus soli (citizenship by birth on Ottoman territory, particularly for children of unknown or stateless parents).61 It also laid down rules for naturalization (jus domicilii), typically requiring five years of residence.61 A crucial provision was the prohibition of dual nationality.60 This measure was directly aimed at undermining the capitulations system, under which many Ottoman non-Muslim subjects had acquired foreign citizenship and the protection of European consulates, thereby evading Ottoman jurisdiction and taxation.60
   The 1869 Nationality Law was a clear assertion of Ottoman state sovereignty in an era of increasing European encroachment. By creating a uniform, secular legal definition of who constituted an "Ottoman," the state aimed to foster the ideal of Ottomanism—a common civic identity that would bind all subjects to the Empire, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. This was a direct response to the dual challenges of

foreign interference through the capitulations and the rise of separatist ethnic nationalisms. However, the very act of legally defining citizenship and distinguishing between "Ottoman" and "foreigner" also had the potential to sharpen communal boundaries. In an empire composed of diverse groups, many of whom were already developing distinct national consciousness, a state-imposed definition of nationality could become a point of contestation, particularly if the promised equality and benefits of Ottoman citizenship were not perceived to be genuinely delivered or if it clashed with burgeoning nationalist aspirations.

# IV. Transforming State and Society: Sectoral Reforms

The Tanzimat reforms permeated nearly every aspect of Ottoman governance and societal structure, representing a comprehensive effort to reshape the Empire along modern lines.

## A. Administrative Reorganization

A central thrust of the Tanzimat was the creation of a more centralized, rationalized, and efficient state administration.

1. Centralization of Power:
   The reforms systematically aimed to strengthen the authority of the central government in Istanbul and extend its effective control over the vast and diverse provinces.1 This was a continuation and intensification of the efforts initiated by Sultan Mahmud II.1 The goal was to overcome the fragmentation of power that had allowed provincial notables and local interests to operate with considerable autonomy, often to the detriment of imperial cohesion and revenue collection. A key aspect of this centralization was the significant expansion and professionalization of the bureaucracy. Officials increasingly became salaried employees of the state, rather than relying on fees or tax-farming for their income, and many received education in newly established state schools designed to equip them with modern administrative skills.3
2. Provincial Reforms: The Vilayet Law (1864, revised 1867)
   The most significant measure for provincial reorganization was the Vilayet Law, first promulgated in 1864 and revised in 1867.14 This law replaced the traditional Eyalet system with a new hierarchical administrative structure. The Empire was divided into Vilayets (provinces), headed by a Vali (governor) appointed directly from Istanbul. Vilayets were further subdivided into Sanjaks (sub-provinces or districts), Kazas (smaller administrative units), Nahiyes (communes or village clusters), and ultimately Karyes (villages).59 This structure was partly inspired by the French prefectorial system and aimed to create a more uniform and centrally controlled provincial administration.59
   The Vilayet Law also mandated the establishment of administrative councils (idare meclisleri) at the vilayet, sanjak, and kaza levels.7 These councils were intended to include a mix of appointed officials and elected local representatives, with provisions for the representation of both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, reflecting the spirit of Ottomanism.59 However, in practice, appointed officials and Muslim members often retained a dominant position in these councils.59

The success of the Vilayet Law varied. While it provided a more rational administrative framework, its effectiveness was often hampered by the lack of qualified personnel, the persistence of local power structures, financial constraints, and the sheer difficulty of implementing uniform reforms across such a diverse empire.59 Nevertheless, the governorships of Midhat Paşa, first in the Danube Vilayet and later in Baghdad, are often cited as examples of successful implementation, where he used the new framework to initiate significant local development projects.59

3. Establishment of the Council of State (Şura-yı Devlet, 1868) and Council of Education (Meclis-i Maarif-i Umumiye, 1845/46)
   To support the centralizing and modernizing agenda, new specialized governmental bodies were created.
   The Şura-yı Devlet (Council of State) was established in 1868, emerging from the division of the older Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances.63 It was conceived as a high legislative and consultative body, tasked with drafting laws and regulations, and also had an administrative justice function, hearing appeals against government actions.63 This represented an early step towards the separation of powers and the creation of a more specialized legislative process. Its judicial powers were somewhat curtailed by the 1876 Constitution.63
   The Meclis-i Maarif-i Umumiye (General Council of Education), established as a temporary body in 1845 and more formally structured thereafter, played a crucial role in shaping educational policy during the Tanzimat.3 It was instrumental in planning the new system of state schools, proposing the regulation of primary and secondary education, advocating for the establishment of a university (Darülfünun), and laying the groundwork for the Ministry of National Education.3 This council was key in shifting the administration of many schools from religious endowments (waqfs) to direct state control, centralizing the educational sphere.3

The administrative reforms of the Tanzimat, particularly the Vilayet Law and the creation of specialized councils like the Şura-yı Devlet and the Meclis-i Maarif-i Umumiye, clearly demonstrate a concerted effort to construct a rationalized, hierarchical, and centralized state apparatus modeled on European precedents. The detailed administrative divisions of the Vilayet system, the defined roles for officials, and the establishment of advisory and policy-making councils all point to a desire for a more modern and efficient form of governance. However, the practical implementation of these structural innovations often fell short of their intended goals. The persistence of issues such as a shortage of adequately trained and motivated officials, resistance from entrenched local elites who saw their power diminished, and the sheer logistical challenges of imposing uniform administrative systems across the vast and diverse territories of the Ottoman Empire meant that the impact of these reforms was uneven. The reforms were, in essence, an ongoing process of negotiation and adaptation between the central government's modernizing designs and the complex realities on the ground, rather than a simple or uniformly successful top-down imposition of a new order.

## B. Legal and Judicial Modernization

The Tanzimat era witnessed a profound transformation of the Ottoman legal system, characterized by the introduction of secular laws and courts alongside the traditional Sharia-based system.

1. Secularization vs. Sharia Law: The Dual Court System (Nizamiye and Sharia Courts)
   A hallmark of Tanzimat legal reform was the establishment of a new system of secular courts, known as Nizamiye courts, starting in 1864.2 These courts were organized under a newly created Ministry of Justice and were heavily influenced by French judicial models, often having a three-tiered structure of instance courts, courts of appeal, and a cassation court in Istanbul.22
   The Nizamiye courts were primarily responsible for applying the new secular codes – commercial, penal, and eventually civil – and handled cases involving both Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as disputes involving foreigners.22 Concurrently, the traditional Sharia courts continued to function, retaining jurisdiction primarily over matters of personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance) for Muslims, and in some instances, other civil matters where parties chose their jurisdiction or where the new codes were not yet fully applied.22 This coexistence of two distinct judicial systems created a significant degree of legal pluralism within the Empire.22
   The relationship between these two systems was complex. While the Penal Code of 1858, for example, was Western-inspired, it also included a provision that it would not repeal Sharia law, leading to potential ambiguities.26 The Mecelle, the Ottoman Civil Code based on Hanafi Sharia, was specifically compiled for use in the Nizamiye courts in civil matters, representing an effort to bridge the gap between Islamic legal tradition and the modernizing court structure.16
2. Adoption and Adaptation of European Legal Models:
   A major feature of the Tanzimat was the large-scale adoption and adaptation of European legal codes, particularly from France.2 This included:
   - The **Commercial Code (1850)** and the **Maritime Commerce Code (1863)**, which were crucial for regulating expanding trade relations with Europe.
   - The **Penal Code (1840, revised 1851, new code 1858)**, which introduced new categories of crimes and punishments and aimed for greater uniformity in criminal justice. These codification efforts were driven by several factors: the need to create a legal environment conducive to modern commerce and interaction with Europeans; the desire to make Ottoman law more "acceptable" to European powers with the long-term goal of abolishing the extraterritorial privileges granted under the capitulations; and the aspiration to provide a more standardized, predictable, and "modern" legal framework for all Ottoman subjects.[12]

The legal reforms undertaken during the Tanzimat did not lead to a complete displacement of Sharia law by a purely secular system. Instead, they resulted in the creation of a hybrid and often overlapping legal order. This pragmatic approach stemmed from the Ottoman reformers' need to balance several competing demands: the imperative to modernize the state and its legal institutions to engage with a European-dominated world, the desire to be seen as "civilized" by European standards (particularly to end the capitulations), and the necessity of maintaining legitimacy within a society where Islamic law and tradition held deep

socio-cultural and religious significance. The establishment of *Nizamiye* courts and the adoption of European-style codes addressed the former needs. Simultaneously, the continued operation of Sharia courts and, more significantly, the monumental effort to codify Hanafi civil law into the *Mecelle* for use in the *Nizamiye* courts, demonstrated a commitment to preserving and adapting Islamic legal heritage. This dual strategy indicates that the Tanzimat legal project was not a simple linear progression towards secularism but a complex process of selective adaptation, syncretism, and the institutionalization of legal pluralism. This hybridity, while perhaps creating jurisdictional complexities, allowed the Ottoman state to navigate the intricate challenges of reform in a diverse and traditional society.

## C. Military Reforms

The modernization of the Ottoman military was a paramount concern for the Tanzimat reformers, viewed as essential for the Empire's defense and survival.

1. Creation of a Modern Conscript Army (Nizamiye) and Reserve (Redif)
   Building on Sultan Mahmud II's destruction of the Janissaries and his initial efforts to create a new army, the Tanzimat reformers focused on establishing a regular, European-style conscript army, known as the Nizamiye.2 This force was intended to be trained, equipped, and organized along modern military lines.
   To supplement the standing army, a reserve force, the Redif Asakir-i Mansure (Victorious Reserve Soldiers), had been founded in 1834.42 The Redif was designed to provide a pool of trained manpower that could be mobilized in times of war. Significant military reorganizations occurred in 1842 and 1869, the latter drawing inspiration from the successful Prussian conscript system.12 By 1843, the active army's strength was set at 150,000 men, organized into several regional standing armies.42
2. The Conscription Code (Kur'a Kanunname-i Hümayunu, 1846) and its Impact
   The Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane had already signaled the intent to reform military recruitment.2 The Conscription Code of 1846, also known as the Kur'a Kanunname-i Hümayunu, formalized the new system.42 It established a system of conscription by lottery (kur'a) for eligible male subjects. Initially, this primarily applied to Muslims, who were required to draw lots between the ages of 20 and 25 for five years of active service in the Nizamiye, followed by seven years in the Redif reserve.42
   The Hatt-ı Hümayun of 1856 theoretically extended the obligation of military service to non-Muslims, as part of the principle of equality.7 However, non-Muslims were generally permitted, and often preferred, to pay an exemption tax (bedel-i askeri) instead of performing active service.7 Full conscription of non-Muslims did not effectively occur until much later, after the Young Turk Revolution.46
   The conscription system provided exemptions for certain categories, such as theological students, sole breadwinners for their families, and significantly, those who could afford to pay for a substitute (bedel).42 This latter provision often favored the wealthy. The new conscription system was not always popular and faced considerable resistance, including evasion, self-mutilation to avoid service, and desertion, particularly in regions where central authority was weak or where military service was seen as an excessive burden.42

3. Modernization of Military Schools (Mekteb-i Harbiye, Mekteb-i Bahriye, Mekteb-i Tıbbiye)
   To staff the new army and navy with qualified officers trained in modern warfare, the Tanzimat era saw significant reforms and expansion of military educational institutions, often based on European (particularly French and Prussian) models.6
   - **Mekteb-i Harbiye (Imperial Military Academy):** Established in 1834, this institution underwent a critical reorganization between 1845 and 1847. A four-year curriculum was implemented, and an advanced class for staff officers, modeled on the French École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, was added. The curriculum included modern sciences such as mechanics, physics, and engineering, alongside traditional military subjects and foreign languages (often French).[67]
   - **Mekteb-i Bahriye (Imperial Naval Academy):** With roots in the late 18th century (as the Mühendishane-i Bahr-i Hümayun), the Naval Academy also saw reforms. A key memorandum by Patrona Mustafa Pasha in 1848 spurred changes.[74] The curriculum was updated to include subjects like mechanics (from 1848), physics (from 1869), advanced mathematics, astronomy, navigation, and, crucially, steam engine technology to adapt to the naval shift from sail to steam.[67]
   - **Mekteb-i Tıbbiye (Imperial Medical School):** Founded in 1827 to train physicians and surgeons for the military, this school was also modernized during the Tanzimat. It adopted Western medical curricula, including practical anatomy with human dissection (a significant innovation), and often used French as a language of instruction due to the availability of European teachers and textbooks.[67]

The military reforms, particularly the establishment of modern military academies, were pivotal not only for attempting to enhance the Empire's defensive capabilities but also for inadvertently fostering a new, technically proficient and Western-oriented elite. The primary driver for these reforms was the existential need to create an army and navy capable of defending the Ottoman state against increasingly powerful European adversaries.[2] This imperative led to the adoption of European military doctrines, training methodologies, and technologies.[6] Consequently, institutions like the Mekteb-i Harbiye and Mekteb-i Bahriye were restructured with curricula that mirrored those of European military schools, often involving European instructors or Ottoman officers trained in Europe.[67] Graduates from these academies were exposed to Western languages (especially French), scientific reasoning, and modern principles of organization and discipline. This new generation of officers was distinct in outlook and education from the traditional military leadership. While their training was intended to produce loyal servants of the Sultan and the Empire, their modern education and exposure to European political concepts, such as constitutionalism and nationalism, also equipped them with the intellectual tools to critique the Ottoman system's deficiencies. This new military elite would later play a significant role in political developments, with many figures from their ranks becoming key players in movements like the Young Ottomans and, more consequentially, the Young Turk Revolution, which sought to implement more radical political changes than the Tanzimat itself had achieved.[8]

## D. Educational Advancements

The Tanzimat reformers recognized that a modern state required an educated populace and a skilled bureaucracy. This led to significant efforts to overhaul the traditional Ottoman education system.

1. Establishment of the Ministry of Education (Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti, 1857) and Council of Education (Meclis-i Maarif-i Umumiye, 1845/46):
   A crucial step towards modernizing education was the creation of centralized bodies to oversee and direct educational policy. The Meclis-i Maarif-i Umumiye (General Council of Education) was established as a temporary body in 1845 and became more formally structured around 1846.3 This council was pivotal in planning the new state-run school system. Its responsibilities included proposing regulations for primary and secondary schools, advocating for the establishment of a university (the Darülfünun), and laying the administrative groundwork for a dedicated ministry.3 A significant outcome of the council's early work was the transfer of many schools from the administration of religious endowments (waqfs) to more direct state supervision, a key move towards centralization and secularization of education.3
   Building on this foundation, the Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti (Ministry of General Education) was officially established in 1857.3 This placed national education affairs under the management of a cabinet-level minister, signifying the state's increased commitment to education as a tool for modernization.
2. New School Systems: Rüşdiye (Secondary), Sultani Schools (Lycées), and the Darülfünun (University)
   The Tanzimat saw the creation of a multi-tiered system of secular state schools, intended to exist alongside, and eventually supplant in importance, the traditional madrasa system.
   - **Rüşdiye Schools (Civilian Secondary Schools):** These schools began to be established from 1846 onwards and formed the backbone of the new secondary education system.[3] They offered a more modern curriculum than the madrasas, including subjects like Ottoman Turkish, arithmetic, history, and geography, alongside religious instruction. The 1869 General Education Regulation mandated the establishment of Rüşdiyes in towns with more than 500 households. Efforts were also made to establish Rüşdiyes for girls, with the first, the Cevri Kalfa Rüşdiyesi, opening in 1859.[3]
   - **Sultani Schools (Lycées):** These were elite higher secondary schools designed to prepare students for university or high-level civil service. The most famous example is the **Mekteb-i Sultani (Galatasaray Lycée)**, established in 1868.[3] These schools often had a strong emphasis on French language instruction and a curriculum that included both Ottoman and European subjects, aiming to create a cosmopolitan elite loyal to the Ottoman state. They were open to both Muslim and non-Muslim students.[3]
   - **Darülfünun (Ottoman University):** The idea of an Ottoman university was

conceived early in the Tanzimat. After several attempts and delays, public lectures began in 1863, and the Darülfünun was officially (though intermittently) opened in 1870.[3] It was envisioned with faculties of humanities (including literature and wisdom), law, and natural sciences and mathematics. The Darülfünun aimed to provide higher education to all Ottoman subjects without religious distinction and to cultivate advanced knowledge within the Empire.[3]

3. Curriculum Development, Teacher Training, and Language of Instruction
   The new schools required new curricula. The Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi (General Education Regulation) of 1869 was a landmark piece of legislation that provided a comprehensive framework for the entire education system.3 It detailed curricula for primary schools (sıbyan mektepleri), Rüşdiyes, and Sultani schools, and outlined plans for the Darülfünun. Primary education was made compulsory for the first time, at least in principle, for both boys and girls.3 Curricula in the secular schools increasingly incorporated subjects like mathematics, Ottoman history, geography, natural sciences, and foreign languages, alongside traditional religious instruction.3
   Recognizing the need for qualified instructors, teacher training schools were established: the Darülmuallimin (Men's Teacher Training College) in 1848 and the Darülmuallimat (Women's Teacher Training College) in 1870.3 These institutions were crucial for staffing the expanding network of new schools.
   The language of instruction was a complex issue. While Ottoman Turkish was promoted as the language for state schools, particularly at the primary and Rüşdiye levels, French played a significant role in higher education and elite institutions like the Mekteb-i Sultani and the military academies.3 This was partly due to the influence of French educational models and the availability of French-speaking teachers and textbooks.

The educational reforms of the Tanzimat, while ambitious in their goal of creating a modern, skilled bureaucracy and an enlightened citizenry, inadvertently contributed to the development of a dual educational system within the Ottoman Empire. The new, state-sponsored secular schools, with their Western-inspired curricula, operated in parallel to the long-established traditional madrasas, which continued to provide religious education. This bifurcation in the educational landscape had profound social and cultural consequences. It fostered the emergence of a new, Western-oriented intellectual and administrative elite, whose worldview and skill set were often distinct from, and sometimes at odds with, those produced by the traditional system. This divergence potentially deepened existing cultural and ideological cleavages within Ottoman society, creating a gap between the modernizing elite and more traditionally-minded segments of the population, including many among the ulema. The challenge of integrating these two educational streams and their respective graduates remained a persistent issue for the remainder of the Empire's existence.

## E. Economic and Infrastructure Development

The Tanzimat reformers understood that military and administrative modernization needed to be underpinned by economic stability and development. However, their efforts in this sphere were fraught with challenges, often leading to increased foreign dependence.

1. Taxation Reforms: Abolition of Iltizam, Introduction of Temettü Tax
   A core promise of the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane was the reform of the taxation system to make it fairer and more efficient, notably by abolishing the abusive system of tax farming (iltizam).2 Under iltizam, the right to collect taxes in a particular area was sold to the highest bidder, who often exploited the populace to maximize profit. While the Tanzimat government made efforts to replace iltizam with direct collection by salaried state officials, the system proved resilient and persisted in various forms and regions due to the state's limited administrative capacity and the influence of entrenched local interests.41
   New forms of taxation were introduced, including the temettü tax, a form of income or profit tax, levied at 3% in 1860 and later raised to 4%.41 This was part of an attempt to diversify revenue sources and tax wealth more equitably.
   The cizye, the traditional poll tax on non-Muslims, was officially abolished by the Hatt-ı Hümayun in 1856 as a key measure of equality.7 However, it was often replaced by a military exemption tax (bedel-i askeri) paid by non-Muslims in lieu of military service, which sometimes amounted to a similar or even higher burden.7
   Despite these reforms, the Ottoman tax system remained problematic. Collection was often inefficient, and the tax burden, particularly on the agricultural population, remained high, sometimes leading to popular unrest and tax revolts.27
2. Banking and Finance: The Ottoman Bank, Public Debt Administration
   To manage state finances and facilitate commerce, modern banking institutions were introduced. The Imperial Ottoman Bank (Bank-ı Osmanî) was established in 1856, primarily with British capital, and was reorganized in 1863 as the Bank-ı Osmanî-i Şahane with significant French and British involvement.8 It was granted the functions of a state bank, including the right to issue currency, and played a role in financing state projects and managing foreign loans.19
   However, the Empire's financial situation deteriorated dramatically during the Tanzimat. Costly wars (especially the Crimean War), ambitious modernization projects, and inefficient revenue collection led to a massive accumulation of foreign debt.6 By 1875, the Ottoman government was forced to declare bankruptcy, defaulting on its loan repayments.2 This financial collapse had severe consequences. In 1881, the European creditor nations established the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA / Düyun-u Umumiye).6 This body, controlled by representatives of foreign bondholders, was given direct control over major sources of Ottoman revenue (such as taxes on salt, silk, tobacco, and spirits, as well as customs duties) to ensure the repayment of the debt. The OPDA became a powerful institution within the Ottoman state, effectively a state within a state, and represented a significant erosion of Ottoman financial sovereignty.
3. Infrastructure Projects: Railways, Telegraphs, Ports, and Roads (Planning, Funding, Impact)
   The Tanzimat era marked the beginning of significant investment in modern infrastructure, seen as vital for economic development, administrative control, and military mobility.8
   - **Railways:** The first railway lines in the Empire began construction during this

period, often through concessions granted to European companies and financed by foreign capital. Early lines included those in Anatolia, such as Izmir-Aydın and Izmir-Kasaba (operational in the 1860s), and networks began to expand in regions like Syria.[10]

- **Telegraphs:** Telegraph networks were rapidly established across the Empire from the late 1840s and 1850s onwards.[21] The telegraph was a crucial tool for improving communication between the central government and the provinces, thereby enhancing administrative control and military coordination.
- **Ports and Roads:** Efforts were made to modernize existing ports (e.g., Izmir, Beirut, Salonica) and construct new ones to facilitate maritime trade.[19] There were also initiatives to improve the road network, although progress was often slow and hampered by financial constraints.[90] These infrastructure projects were intended to stimulate commerce, facilitate the movement of goods and troops, enable the exploitation of natural resources (which often benefited European economic interests), and project an image of a modernizing state.[19] However, their reliance on foreign loans and concessions further deepened the Empire's financial indebtedness and foreign influence.

The pursuit of infrastructure modernization during the Tanzimat period created a significant paradox for the Ottoman Empire. While these projects—railways, telegraphs, modernized ports—did bring tangible benefits in terms of improved communication, faster transportation, and potentially increased trade volumes [19], they were overwhelmingly financed through foreign loans and concessions granted to European companies.[19] The Ottoman state itself lacked the vast capital and often the technical expertise required for such large-scale undertakings.[90] Consequently, European powers and financiers played a dominant role in determining which projects were prioritized and how they were executed. Often, these projects were designed to serve European economic interests, such as facilitating the export of Ottoman raw materials (cotton, grain) to European industries or the import of European manufactured goods into Ottoman markets.[19] While intended to strengthen the Ottoman state and economy, this reliance on foreign capital led to a crippling accumulation of public debt.[6] The eventual default in 1875 and the subsequent establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration in 1881 effectively handed over control of significant portions of Ottoman state revenue to foreign creditors.[6] This situation starkly illustrated how the drive for modernization, when pursued under conditions of financial weakness and external pressure, could paradoxically lead to a diminution of the very sovereignty and economic independence the reforms were ostensibly designed to bolster.

## F. Social Changes and Urban Transformation

The Tanzimat reforms initiated profound social changes and began to reshape the urban landscapes of the Ottoman Empire.

1. The Ideology of Ottomanism: Equality and Common Citizenship
   A central ideological pillar of the Tanzimat was Ottomanism (Osmanlılık). This was an attempt to create a unified imperial identity that would transcend traditional religious

and ethnic loyalties.5 It promoted the idea of a common Ottoman citizenship based on legal equality for all subjects before the law, regardless of their creed or origin, and loyalty to the Sultan and the Ottoman state. This ideology was a direct response to the rise of separatist nationalist movements within the Empire and was seen as a means to preserve its territorial integrity by fostering a sense of shared belonging. The Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane and particularly the Hatt-ı Hümayun were key expressions of this policy.

2. Impact on Non-Muslim Millets and Inter-Communal Relations
   The Tanzimat reforms significantly altered the status and organization of the non-Muslim communities (millets). The promise of legal equality, access to public office and state schools, and the abolition of discriminatory taxes like the jizya were intended to integrate non-Muslims more fully into the Ottoman polity.2
   However, the implementation of these reforms was often uneven and met with mixed reactions. While some non-Muslims welcomed the new opportunities and protections, the reforms also faced resistance from conservative elements within the Muslim population who resented the perceived erosion of their traditional dominance.15 Furthermore, the requirement for millets to reorganize their internal administrations under new, state-approved constitutions (like the Armenian National Constitution of 1863, the Greek General Regulations of 1862, and the Jewish Hahamhane Nizamnamesi of 1865) led to increased lay participation in communal governance but also formalized distinct communal identities.19 This, in some cases, provided new platforms for articulating communal grievances and, eventually, nationalist aspirations, particularly when the promised equality was not fully realized in practice. Inter-communal tensions were not always alleviated and, in some instances, may have been exacerbated by the changing social and legal landscape.
3. Urban Planning and Modernization of Cities
   The Tanzimat era brought about significant transformations in the physical fabric and social organization of Ottoman cities, particularly major commercial centers and port cities like Istanbul, Izmir (Smyrna), Beirut, and Thessaloniki.18 These changes were driven by a combination of factors: the need to address practical problems such as frequent fires, overcrowding due to migration, and public health concerns; the desire to create a more "modern" and "European" urban environment; and the requirements of expanding commerce and new infrastructure.18
   European urban planning principles began to be adopted, leading to new building regulations (e.g., concerning street widths, building heights, construction materials), the creation of new public spaces, and the development of Western-style municipal services and infrastructures, such as piped water, gas lighting, and tramways, often implemented by foreign companies.18 The spatial organization of cities started to change, with a shift from traditional inward-looking courtyard houses to buildings with facades facing wider, more regular streets.19 This urban modernization aimed to enhance the efficiency, order, and image of Ottoman cities in an era of increasing global interaction.

The Tanzimat's core ideology of Ottomanism, promoting legal equality and a shared civic identity, sought to unify the diverse peoples of the Empire. However, its practical application

often yielded paradoxical results. The promise of equality before the law for all subjects [2], while a progressive step, could also sharpen the awareness of existing inequalities when these promises were not fully met in reality.[2] For non-Muslim communities, the very act of being granted new rights and being asked to reorganize their communal structures under state-sanctioned regulations (the millet *Nizamnames*) [19] had a dual effect. On one hand, it integrated them more formally into the state apparatus. On the other, it provided them with new, legitimate platforms for internal political mobilization and the articulation of their distinct communal interests. These reorganized millets, often with increased lay participation, could become vehicles for expressing grievances and fostering a sense of separate identity, especially when influenced by the broader currents of nationalism sweeping through Europe and impacting Ottoman minorities.[6] Thus, the reforms designed to promote integration and loyalty could, under certain conditions, provide the tools and consciousness that fueled differentiation and, ultimately, contributed to the very nationalist tendencies the policy of Ottomanism aimed to counteract.

# V. Reactions and Resistance to the Tanzimat

The sweeping reforms of the Tanzimat era, touching nearly every aspect of Ottoman life, inevitably provoked a range of reactions, from enthusiastic adoption to staunch resistance, both at the imperial center and in the diverse provinces.

## A. Internal Opposition:

1. The Ulema and Conservative Elites: Resistance to Secularization and Centralization
   A significant source of opposition came from elements within the ulema (Islamic religious scholars) and other conservative elites who viewed the Tanzimat's secularizing tendencies and centralization of power with alarm.3 The introduction of secular laws (such as the Penal and Commercial Codes) and secular courts (Nizamiye) was perceived as an encroachment upon the domain of Sharia (Islamic law) and a diminution of the ulema's traditional legal and judicial authority.24 Western-inspired educational reforms, establishing state schools with secular curricula, were also seen as a threat to the madrasa system and the ulema's role as primary educators.3 Some ulema went as far as to declare European-inspired reforms as bidah (reprehensible innovation in religion).24 This opposition could be forceful; for instance, pressure from conservative circles, including the ulema, at times led to the temporary dismissal of key reformist ministers like Mustafa Reşid Paşa.24
   However, it is important to avoid a monolithic portrayal of the ulema as purely reactionary. Recent historiography suggests a more complex picture, with some ulema participating in the reform process, serving on councils that drafted new laws (including the Commercial Code, where the Shaykh al-Islam offered no legitimacy barriers 53), and adapting to the changing administrative landscape through professionalization.93 The codification of Islamic civil law in the Mecelle, led by the ulema scholar Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, can be seen as an attempt by a segment of the religious elite to engage with modernization on their own terms.37

Other conservative elements of the pre-Tanzimat ruling elite also resisted the reforms, particularly the centralization of power which threatened their entrenched privileges, patronage networks, and traditional modes of authority.6

2. Provincial Notables (Ayan) and Local Power Structures:
   For centuries, provincial notables (ayan or derebeys) had wielded considerable autonomous power in many regions of the Empire, often controlling land, resources, and local administration.7 The Tanzimat's drive for centralization, including the direct appointment of governors, the establishment of new provincial administrative structures under the Vilayet Law, the abolition of tax farming (which many notables had controlled), and changes in land tenure, directly challenged their authority and economic interests.7
   Reactions from these provincial elites varied. Some actively resisted the reforms, leading to unrest or attempts to obstruct their implementation. Others adopted a more pragmatic approach, seeking to maintain their influence by participating in the new provincial administrative councils (idare meclisleri) established by the Vilayet Law, using these new institutions to protect their local interests.15 The effectiveness of central control often depended on the strength of the appointed governor and the specific local power dynamics. The purges of Janissaries and some local lords carried out by Mahmud II in the 1820s and 1830s may have served as a warning, limiting overt widespread resistance from these groups during the early Tanzimat.14 However, localized resistance, such as the uprising of Dervish Cara in Albania in 1844 against new taxes and conscription, did occur.14

The resistance to the Tanzimat reforms was not a unified movement but rather a complex tapestry of reactions shaped by the specific nature of the reforms and the diverse interests of various social groups. While it is evident that certain segments of the ulema and the old guard actively opposed changes that directly undermined their religious authority, traditional worldviews, or entrenched power [15], the narrative of a simple reformers-versus-reactionaries conflict is an oversimplification. Some ulema, for example, participated in the very councils that drafted and implemented reforms, including those involving the adoption of foreign legal concepts.[53] Moreover, recent scholarship highlights a trend towards the professionalization and adaptation of the ulema within the evolving state apparatus, rather than their wholesale rejection of modernity.[93] Similarly, provincial notables, while often resentful of the loss of autonomy, did not always resort to outright rebellion. Many sought to navigate the new system by participating in the newly established provincial councils, attempting to co-opt these institutions to serve their ongoing interests.[15] This indicates that the Tanzimat era created new arenas for power negotiation and adaptation, where resistance could take various forms, from direct opposition to strategic engagement with the new structures. The success and penetration of reforms were thus contingent on these intricate local power dynamics and the ability of different groups to either resist, adapt to, or even benefit from the transformative changes.

## B. Responses from Non-Muslim Millets:

The Tanzimat reforms profoundly impacted the non-Muslim communities (*millets*) of the Ottoman Empire, primarily through the principles of Ottomanism and legal equality, and the specific mandate in the Hatt-ı Hümayun of 1856 for the reorganization of millet administrations.[7] Each major millet responded to these changes in distinct ways, often leading to internal transformations and a redefinition of their relationship with the Ottoman state.

1. Armenian Millet: The Armenian National Constitution (Nizamname-i Millet-i Ermeniyan, 1863) and Rise of Nationalism
   The Armenian community was one of the most active in responding to the Tanzimat's call for millet reorganization. The Armenian National Constitution (Nizamname-i Millet-i Ermeniyan) was drafted by Armenian intellectuals and community leaders and officially approved by the Ottoman government in 1863.44 This comprehensive document, consisting of 150 articles, established a representative National Assembly with significant lay participation, thereby curtailing the traditional autocratic power of the Armenian Patriarch and secularizing aspects of communal governance.45 It was a landmark achievement in communal self-regulation and even influenced later Ottoman legislation.52
   However, the promise of equality and improved conditions often remained unfulfilled for many Armenians, particularly in the eastern provinces. They continued to suffer from heavy taxation, land disputes (often involving Kurdish tribes or newly settled Muslim refugees, muhajirs), lack of security, and obstruction of reforms by local officials.52 This disillusionment, combined with a vibrant cultural and intellectual revival (the Zartonk), fueled the growth of Armenian nationalist sentiment.52 Secret societies and eventually political parties like the Armenakan Party (founded 1885), the Hnchakian Revolutionary Party (1887), and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun, 1890) emerged, advocating for reforms, autonomy, and, for some, independence, often resorting to revolutionary tactics and armed self-defense.13
2. Greek Orthodox Millet: The General Regulations (Genikoi Kanonismoi, 1862) and Nationalist Aspirations
   The Greek Orthodox Millet (Rum Milleti), historically the largest and most influential non-Muslim community, also underwent reorganization with the adoption of the General Regulations (Genikoi Kanonismoi) in 1862.45 These regulations similarly aimed to define the structure of communal governance, increase the role of lay councils in managing church and community affairs, and regulate the powers of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.
   The bourgeois elements within the Greek community of Istanbul, in particular, viewed the Tanzimat reforms as an opportunity to advance their own demands for secularization within the millet and to renegotiate their status within the changing imperial framework.51 The reforms provided avenues for greater participation in communal administration.
   However, the Greek Orthodox millet also faced internal and external challenges during this period. The rise of nationalist movements among other Balkan Orthodox peoples (such as Bulgarians, Serbs, and Romanians), who had traditionally been under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Greek-dominated Patriarchate, led to demands for

autocephalous national churches.45 This created significant tension within the Rum Millet and weakened the Patriarchate's overarching authority. Furthermore, the existence of an independent Greek kingdom since 1830 served as a powerful magnet for Greek nationalist aspirations within the Ottoman Empire, and the Tanzimat's promises of equality did little to dampen these sentiments.

3. Jewish Millet: The Hahamhane Nizamnamesi (Organizational Regulations of the Rabbinate, 1865) and Communal Dynamics
   The reorganization of the Jewish millet took place with the promulgation of the Hahamhane Nizamnamesi (Organizational Regulations of the Rabbinate) in 1865.43 This followed a period of internal communal discussion and some disagreement, as required by the Hatt-ı Hümayun.48 The regulations aimed to define the structure of Jewish communal governance, including the powers and selection of the Haham Başı (Chief Rabbi), and to increase the involvement of lay councils in managing communal affairs, mirroring the trend seen in other millets.43
   The Tanzimat era brought both opportunities and challenges for the Jewish community. The Land Code of 1858, for instance, allowed Jews to purchase land more freely, including in Palestine.7 However, like other communities, the Jewish millet experienced internal debates between traditionalist factions and those advocating for modern, European-style educational and social reforms.95 The new legal equality also meant navigating a changing relationship with the Ottoman state and other communities.

The Tanzimat's policy of requiring the formal reorganization of the millets through state-approved constitutions or regulations, while ostensibly aimed at creating uniform, loyal, and modern administrative units within the framework of Ottomanism, had a complex and often paradoxical impact. By mandating these *Nizamnames*, the Ottoman state inadvertently fostered a process of internal democratization and secularization within these communities. The regulations typically enhanced the power of elected lay councils and assemblies at the expense of the traditional, often autocratic, authority of religious leaders like patriarchs or the chief rabbi.[45] This shift in internal governance, prompted by the state itself, created new leadership structures and deliberative bodies within the millets. These newly empowered lay elements and councils became focal points for discussing communal affairs, addressing grievances, promoting cultural and linguistic revivals, and, significantly, articulating distinct communal and increasingly national interests. When the broader promises of Ottomanist equality failed to fully materialize, or when external nationalist ideologies provided compelling alternatives, these state-sanctioned communal structures could transform into effective vehicles for challenging both traditional clerical control and Ottoman state authority, thereby contributing to the very fragmentation the Tanzimat sought to prevent.

## C. Reactions in the Provinces:

The impact of and reactions to the Tanzimat reforms varied considerably across the Empire's diverse provinces, shaped by local socio-economic conditions, existing power structures, and ethnic or religious compositions.

1. Arab Provinces: Varying Responses to Centralization and Ottomanism
   In the Arab-majority provinces of the Empire (e.g., Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Hijaz), the

Tanzimat's centralizing policies and the ideology of Ottomanism elicited a range of responses.15 Many established local notables and tribal leaders, who had long enjoyed significant autonomy, resented the new regulations that aimed to curtail their power, particularly in areas like taxation (e.g., abolition of tax farming) and land tenure.15 The Vilayet Law of 1864, which sought to standardize provincial administration under governors appointed from Istanbul, was a direct challenge to their traditional authority.15

However, resistance was not always overt. Some Arab notables adapted to the new system by seeking positions within the newly formed provincial administrative councils, using these platforms to protect their interests and mediate between the central government and local populations.15 The implementation of reforms was often gradual and uneven across the Arab provinces, with many regions, especially those more remote from the imperial center, feeling the impact much later in the 19th century.15

Certain urban centers in the Arab lands, particularly in Syria and Lebanon, had already experienced a degree of modernization under the earlier Egyptian occupation led by Muhammad Ali's son, Ibrahim Pasha (1831-1840).15 These regions also had more extensive commercial and cultural contacts with Europe through trade and missionary activities, which sometimes created a climate more receptive to Tanzimat ideals among certain segments of the urban population.15 There were indeed Arab intellectuals and notables who became adherents of the Tanzimat, such as Yusuf al-Khalidi, a prominent Jerusalemite from a notable family who served in the Ottoman administration and parliament.15

Despite these instances of engagement, Arabs generally remained underrepresented in the highest echelons of the Ottoman government in Istanbul.15 The ideology of Ottomanism, with its promise of equality, had a complex reception. While it offered a framework for inclusion, the perceived dominance of Turkish elements in the central administration and the slow pace of tangible improvements in many Arab regions limited its appeal. Later, Sultan Abdülhamid II's emphasis on Pan-Islamism would, in part, be an attempt to secure the loyalty of the Arab provinces by appealing to a shared Islamic identity, as a counter to both Tanzimat-era secularism and growing European influence.99

2. Balkan Peoples: Exacerbation of Nationalist Tensions and Uprisings

   In the predominantly Christian-populated Balkan provinces (e.g., Bosnia, Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Albania, Macedonia), the Tanzimat reforms often had the unintended consequence of exacerbating existing nationalist tensions and contributing to further unrest and uprisings.6

   The centralizing measures, particularly new forms of taxation and the introduction of universal (though often resisted or commuted) military conscription, were frequently perceived by Balkan populations not as modernizing efforts for their benefit, but as increased interference and oppression by the Ottoman state.46 Grievances over the failure to fully implement promised equality, coupled with economic hardship and administrative abuses by local Ottoman officials, provided fertile ground for nationalist agitation.12

Nationalist leaders and intellectuals in the Balkans skillfully exploited these discontents to mobilize support for autonomy or outright independence.82 Uprisings, such as the Herzegovina Uprising of 1875 and the Bulgarian agitation that led to the April Uprising of 1876, were directly linked to the socio-economic and political conditions of the Tanzimat era, even if their roots lay deeper in burgeoning national consciousness and external influences (particularly from Russia and Serbia).12

For specific groups like the Albanians, the Tanzimat's emphasis on a unified Ottoman identity, and later the Turkification policies of the Young Turks, were seen as threats to their distinct language, culture, and traditions. This spurred resistance and the development of Albanian cultural and political nationalism, often centered on demands for education in the Albanian language and greater administrative autonomy.105

The Tanzimat's ambitious project of centralization, while intended to consolidate and strengthen the Ottoman Empire, frequently clashed with the established local power dynamics and socio-economic arrangements in the provinces. This disruption, whether through new tax burdens, conscription demands, or administrative reorganization, elicited varied responses. In the Arab provinces, where large landowning notables often held sway, the reaction was often one of pragmatic adaptation: while resenting the erosion of their traditional autonomy, many sought to maintain their influence by participating in the new provincial councils created by the Vilayet Law.[15] This suggests a strategy of co-opting the new institutions to serve existing local interests. In contrast, in the Balkan provinces, where ethno-religious identities were often more sharply defined and where nationalist movements were already gaining momentum, often with external support (particularly from Russia in the case of Slavic populations), the same centralizing reforms were frequently perceived as an intensification of foreign, Ottoman rule.[6] Here, the reforms, coupled with the often incomplete or inequitable application of promised rights like equality, directly fueled nationalist uprisings aimed at achieving autonomy or independence. The Tanzimat's promise of "equality" itself could be a double-edged sword: if certain groups, such as Muslims in some areas, felt that the reforms were undermining their traditional status relative to newly empowered Christian communities, this too could breed resentment and instability.[52] The diverse reactions across the provinces underscore a crucial reality: the impact of centrally decreed reforms is invariably mediated by local historical contexts, existing power structures, communal identities, and the perceived fairness and efficacy of their implementation.

# VI. The Role of Foreign Powers

The Tanzimat reforms were not implemented in a geopolitical vacuum. The Ottoman Empire in the 19th century was deeply enmeshed in the complex web of European Great Power politics, and the policies of Britain, France, and Russia significantly influenced the course, content, and consequences of the reforms.

## A. British Policy: Preserving Ottoman Integrity, Commercial Interests, Protection of Christians

British foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat era was multifaceted,

driven by a combination of strategic, economic, and, to a lesser extent, humanitarian considerations.

- **Motivations:**
    - **Preserving Ottoman Integrity:** A cornerstone of British policy for much of the 19th century (particularly from 1840 to 1878) was the preservation of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.[9] This was primarily motivated by a desire to prevent the expansion of rival powers, especially Russia, whose southward ambitions towards the Mediterranean and British India were viewed as a major threat (the "Great Game").[9] A weak but intact Ottoman Empire was seen as a useful buffer.
    - **Commercial Interests:** Britain had significant and growing commercial interests in the Ottoman Empire. The Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Convention of 1838 (Treaty of Balta Liman) established principles of free trade and low tariffs, opening up vast Ottoman markets to British manufactured goods.[6] The Ottoman Empire became one of Britain's largest export markets during this period.[9]
    - **Protection of Christians/Humanitarian Concerns:** British public opinion and diplomatic pressure often focused on the rights and treatment of Christian minorities within the Ottoman Empire.[9] British diplomats frequently urged the Porte to guarantee the legal equality and security of its Christian subjects, influencing the content of the Tanzimat edicts, particularly the Hatt-ı Hümayun. While genuine humanitarian concerns existed, this also provided a convenient pretext for British involvement in Ottoman internal affairs.
- **Specific Actions/Influences:**
    - Britain provided crucial diplomatic and military support to the Ottoman Empire against Muhammad Ali of Egypt in 1839-1841, helping to preserve Ottoman territorial integrity in Syria and Arabia.[9] The promulgation of the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane was, in part, an attempt by the Ottomans to secure this British aid.[23]
    - Britain, alongside France, allied with the Ottoman Empire against Russia during the Crimean War (1853-1856).[6]
    - British influence was significant in the issuance of the Hatt-ı Hümayun of 1856, which followed the Crimean War and reaffirmed commitments to reform and equality for non-Muslims.[9]
    - British capital was instrumental in establishing the Imperial Ottoman Bank in 1856 (reorganized 1863).[19]
    - Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, Britain played a leading role in the Congress of Berlin, which significantly revised the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano, aiming to limit Russian gains and maintain a semblance of Ottoman presence in the Balkans, albeit at the cost of further Ottoman territorial losses and the British acquisition of Cyprus.[12]

## B. French Policy: Cultural Influence, Protection of Catholics, Economic

## and Geopolitical Interests

France also played a significant and complex role in the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat, driven by its own set of interests.

- **Motivations:**
    - **Cultural Influence:** France had a long tradition of cultural engagement with the Ottoman Empire, and French language and culture were highly influential among the Ottoman elite and in the newly established modern schools.[20] Many Tanzimat reforms, particularly in law (e.g., Penal Code, Commercial Code) and administration (e.g., Vilayet system), were directly modeled on French systems.[2] This reflected a form of "mission civilisatrice."
    - **Protection of Catholics:** France had a traditional role as the protector of Catholic communities within the Ottoman Empire, which provided a basis for diplomatic leverage.
    - **Economic Interests:** French businesses and financiers were heavily involved in the Ottoman economy, investing in infrastructure projects like railways and ports, and participating in the establishment of the Ottoman Bank.[19] French capital was particularly prominent in railway development in Syria.[90]
    - **Geopolitical Rivalry:** France competed with Britain and Russia for influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Ottoman sphere. Its policies often aimed to enhance its own prestige and power relative to these rivals.
- **Specific Actions/Influences:**
    - The French legal system served as the primary model for the Ottoman Commercial Code of 1850, the Penal Code, and the Maritime Commerce Code of 1863.[2]
    - French urban planning principles influenced the modernization of Ottoman cities.[19]
    - France allied with the Ottoman Empire and Britain during the Crimean War against Russia.[2]
    - Despite the widespread adoption of French models, French observers were not always convinced of the efficacy or sincerity of the reforms. The Prince de Joinville, son of King Louis-Philippe, famously dismissed the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane as a "miserable piece of rag" unlikely to save the "Turkish nation" from decadence, reflecting a degree of skepticism or perhaps differing expectations regarding the reforms.[109]

# C. Russian Policy: Expansionism, Pan-Slavism, Protection of Orthodox Christians

Russia's policy towards the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat was consistently antagonistic, driven by long-standing imperial ambitions.

- **Motivations:**

    - **Territorial Expansion:** A primary goal of Russian foreign policy for centuries was to expand southward at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, seeking control over the Black Sea, access to the Mediterranean through the Straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles), and influence in the Balkans and Caucasus.[2]
    - **Pan-Slavism:** Russia actively promoted Pan-Slavist ideology, supporting Slavic nationalist movements in the Ottoman Balkans (e.g., among Serbs, Bulgarians) as a means to weaken Ottoman rule and extend its own influence in the region.[6]
    - **Protection of Orthodox Christians:** Russia claimed a special right to protect the Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire, a claim rooted in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774). This was frequently used as a pretext for diplomatic pressure and military intervention in Ottoman affairs.[25]
- **Specific Actions/Influences:**
    - Russia engaged in numerous wars against the Ottoman Empire throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, nearly all of which resulted in Ottoman territorial losses and an increase in Russian power and influence in the Black Sea region, the Balkans, and the Caucasus.[4]
    - The Crimean War (1853-1856) was a major confrontation sparked by Russian demands concerning the Holy Places in Palestine and its claims to protect Orthodox Christians. Russia's defeat in this war, at the hands of an Ottoman-British-French alliance, temporarily checked its expansion but did not extinguish its ambitions.[6]
    - Russia played a key role in instigating and supporting the Balkan uprisings of the 1870s, which culminated in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The initial Russian victory led to the Treaty of San Stefano, which would have created a large, Russian-dominated Bulgarian state. This treaty was, however, revised by the Congress of Berlin due to pressure from other European powers, particularly Britain and Austria-Hungary, though the Ottomans still suffered significant territorial losses and a further diminution of their sovereignty in Europe.[12]
    - Russian policy consistently worked to undermine Ottoman stability and territorial integrity. The Tanzimat reforms, aimed at strengthening and preserving the Empire, were often viewed by Russia as an unwelcome development that could hinder its long-term strategic goals.

The Tanzimat reforms unfolded under the intense and often conflicting pressures of European Great Power interests. While Britain and France, for their own strategic and economic reasons, generally favored the preservation of a reformed and "modernized" Ottoman Empire that could serve as a bulwark against Russian expansion and a market for their goods, their interventions were not disinterested. Demands for legal equality for Christian minorities, while aligning with liberal ideals, also provided avenues for increased European influence and sometimes served to highlight Ottoman "otherness".[9] Economic policies promoted by Britain and France, such as free trade agreements and the financing of infrastructure through loans, deeply integrated the Ottoman economy into the European capitalist system, but often on terms that favored European interests and led to Ottoman financial dependency and the

erosion of economic sovereignty, as exemplified by the establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration.[6] Russia, in contrast, pursued a more overtly disruptive policy, consistently seeking to weaken and dismember the Ottoman Empire through military pressure, the incitement of nationalist movements among Balkan Slavs and other Orthodox populations, and the assertion of protective rights over Ottoman Christians.[12] The Ottoman reformers were thus compelled to navigate a treacherous diplomatic landscape, attempting to leverage the rivalries among the Great Powers to their advantage (as seen in seeking British aid against Muhammad Ali of Egypt [23]), while simultaneously trying to implement reforms that would strengthen the state internally. Ultimately, the Empire remained a crucial but vulnerable player in the "Eastern Question," with its reform efforts constantly shaped, and often constrained or manipulated, by the competing geopolitical agendas of Europe's dominant powers.

# VII. The Halt and Legacy of the Tanzimat

Despite nearly four decades of intensive reform efforts, the Tanzimat movement gradually lost momentum and effectively came to an end by the mid-1870s, giving way to a period of crisis and eventually a new political phase under Sultan Abdülhamid II. Nevertheless, its long-term impact on the Ottoman Empire and its successor states was profound and multifaceted.

## A. Reasons for the Stagnation and Eventual Halt of Reforms

Several interconnected factors contributed to the decline and ultimate cessation of the Tanzimat reform process:

- **Concentration of Power and Sultanic Autocracy:** Ironically, one of the successes of the Tanzimat – the centralization of administrative and legal authority – ultimately contributed to its demise. As power became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the Sultan, particularly Abdülaziz, there were fewer checks on his authority. When Abdülaziz began to abuse this power in his later reign, adopting arbitrary and revisionary policies, the reformist bureaucrats found it difficult to counter him.[2]
- **Loss of Key Reformist Statesmen:** The deaths of the leading Tanzimat statesmen, Keçecizade Fuat Paşa in 1869 and, more critically, Mehmed Emin Âli Paşa in 1871, deprived the reform movement of its most experienced and influential champions.[4] Their passing created a leadership vacuum that was often filled by less capable or more reactionary figures, leading to political instability and a loss of direction for the reform agenda.[5]
- **Financial Crisis and Bankruptcy:** The immense cost of the reforms, coupled with expensive wars (like the Crimean War) and inefficient financial management, led to a massive accumulation of foreign debt. In 1875, the Ottoman state declared bankruptcy, unable to meet its obligations to European creditors.[2] This financial collapse severely crippled the state's capacity to fund further reforms and led to increased foreign intervention in Ottoman finances through the Public Debt Administration.
- **Growing Ethnic Nationalism and Internal Unrest:** Despite the policy of Ottomanism, nationalist movements continued to gain strength, particularly in the Balkan provinces. Uprisings in Herzegovina (1875) and Bulgaria (1876), fueled by a combination of

nationalist aspirations, socio-economic grievances, and external agitation, consumed the state's resources and attention, diverting focus from internal reform.[2] These crises also led to increased European pressure and intervention.

- **Conservative Backlash:** Persistent opposition from conservative elements within Ottoman society, including some ulema and traditional elites who resented the secularizing trends, the erosion of their privileges, and the perceived negative impacts of Westernization, continued to undermine the reforms.[3]
- **Accession of Abdülhamid II and Suspension of the Constitution:** The deposition of Sultan Abdülaziz in 1876 and the brief, troubled reign of Murad V were followed by the accession of Sultan Abdülhamid II. While his reign began with the promulgation of the first Ottoman Constitution in December 1876 – itself a product of the Tanzimat-era intellectual currents – he used the pretext of the disastrous war with Russia (1877-1878) to suspend the constitution and dissolve the parliament in 1878, inaugurating a long period of autocratic rule that effectively marked the end of the Tanzimat reform era.[4]

## B. Long-Term Impact on the Ottoman Empire:

Despite its eventual halt and its many shortcomings, the Tanzimat left an indelible mark on the Ottoman state and society.

1. Paving the Way for Constitutionalism (1876 and 1908)
   The Tanzimat reforms, by introducing concepts of legal equality, citizenship, a more rationalized bureaucracy, secular state schools, and representative provincial councils, created an intellectual and political environment in which the idea of constitutional government could take root.8 The administrative and legal changes, even if imperfectly implemented, provided a foundation upon which constitutional structures could be envisioned.88
   The First Ottoman Constitutional Era (1876-1878), though brief, was a direct outgrowth of the political and intellectual ferment of the Tanzimat period.2 The statesmen and intellectuals who drafted the 1876 Constitution, such as Midhat Paşa, were themselves products of the Tanzimat milieu. The memory of this constitution and the ideals it embodied, however imperfectly, remained a potent force during Abdülhamid II's autocratic reign and directly inspired the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, which led to the restoration of the constitution and the inauguration of the Second Constitutional Era.8
2. Influence on the Young Turk Movement
   The Tanzimat reforms played a crucial role in shaping the intellectual and political background of the Young Turk movement. The modern secular schools and military academies established during the Tanzimat produced a new generation of educated Ottomans – military officers, civil servants, and intellectuals – who were exposed to Western ideas of liberalism, constitutionalism, and nationalism.8
   While the Young Turks built upon certain Tanzimat ideals, such as the need for modernization and a constitutional framework to save the Empire, they were also critical of what they perceived as the Tanzimat's failures: its inability to prevent foreign

encroachment, its contribution to the Empire's financial woes, and the eventual slide back into autocracy under Abdülhamid II, who had suspended the Tanzimat-era constitution.8 Their primary goal in 1908 was the restoration of the 1876 Constitution and the establishment of a parliamentary government.8

The legacy of the Tanzimat is thus deeply paradoxical. The very tools of modernity—new secular schools, a Westernized military education, concepts of legal equality and citizenship, and a more centralized state apparatus—introduced by the Tanzimat reformers to preserve and strengthen the Ottoman Empire were, in time, turned towards new political ends by subsequent generations. The new elites, educated in Tanzimat-era institutions and imbued with many of its modernizing ideals [3], became increasingly critical of the autocratic system that the Tanzimat, in its later stages, had paradoxically reinforced under Sultan Abdülaziz and which was fully realized under Abdülhamid II.[4] These elites, first as Young Ottomans and later as Young Turks [10], drew upon the intellectual currents and institutional precedents of the Tanzimat—including the very notion of a constitution—to challenge autocratic rule and demand further, more radical political reforms.[8] The Tanzimat's emphasis on creating a strong, centralized state also provided a model that later nationalist movements, including Turkish nationalism which gained prominence under the Young Turks, would adapt for their own state-building projects, ultimately leading to the transformation and eventual dissolution of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire that the Tanzimat had striven to save.

## C. Legacy in Successor States (Balkan and Arab nations): Administrative, Legal, and Social Continuities and Departures

The administrative, legal, and social changes introduced during the Tanzimat had a lasting, though varied, impact on the territories that eventually became independent successor states.

- Balkan States (e.g., Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Romania):
  Upon gaining independence or autonomy, many Balkan states embarked on intensive nation-building projects. This often involved a conscious effort to distance themselves from their Ottoman past, a process sometimes termed "de-Ottomanization".114 The Ottoman period was frequently portrayed in nationalist historiographies as an era of oppression, and there was a strong impetus to adopt Western European models of governance, law, and culture.114
  Despite this, the legacy of Ottoman rule, including some Tanzimat-era structures, was not entirely eradicated. For instance, in Bulgaria, the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 continued to influence land tenure, property registration, and agricultural relations for a considerable time after autonomy in 1878 and full independence in 1908.55 Certain land categories defined by Ottoman law, such as mera (communal pastures) and waqf lands, persisted, and Bulgarian legal and administrative systems had to contend with these inherited frameworks, selectively adapting or dismantling them.55 Similarly, aspects of Ottoman administrative divisions or local government practices sometimes found echoes in the new states.
  The Tanzimat's emphasis on modernization and Westernization, often imposed on the

Ottoman Empire with European encouragement, was ironically continued by the newly independent Balkan states. However, this Western influence was now often direct, with these states seeking to emulate European models in their legal systems, armies, and educational institutions, sometimes with the direct involvement of Western powers who saw the region as a new sphere of influence.114 The Tanzimat, by initiating this process of modernization and opening the region to European legal and administrative concepts, inadvertently paved the way for this later, more direct Westernization in the successor states.

- Arab Successor States (e.g., Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan):
  The impact of Tanzimat reforms in the Arab provinces was also significant, though its legacy in the post-Ottoman Arab states is complex and varies by region.
  In Egypt, which already had a degree of autonomy under Muhammad Ali and his successors, the Tanzimat reforms were implemented to some extent, particularly regarding administrative and legal structures.28 Egyptian legal codes and court systems developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries show influences from both Ottoman Tanzimat laws (which were often French-inspired) and direct European legal traditions.
  In Iraq, Tanzimat reforms, particularly during the governorship of Midhat Paşa in Baghdad (1869-1872), led to the establishment of new administrative structures (vilayet system), land registration (based on the 1858 Land Code), secular schools, and municipal councils.100 These reforms had a lasting impact on land ownership patterns, often benefiting tribal shaykhs who registered communal lands in their names, and contributed to the emergence of a new urban Iraqi intelligentsia educated in modern schools.100 The administrative and legal frameworks established during the Tanzimat provided a foundation upon which the modern Iraqi state was later built, albeit under British mandate influence.100
  In Syria and Lebanon, the Tanzimat reforms also brought changes in administration (Vilayet system), law, and education.102 The introduction of new legal codes and secular courts operated alongside existing religious courts. The port cities like Beirut experienced significant urban modernization influenced by European models, a trend encouraged by the Tanzimat.19 The legacy of Ottoman administrative divisions and legal codes, including the Mecelle, persisted in various forms after the French mandate period.
  The Ottoman Nationality Law of 1869 had direct implications for the inhabitants of these regions, including Palestinians, defining their status as Ottoman citizens.61 This legal framework became a reference point in later disputes over nationality and citizenship after the Empire's dissolution.
  Generally, the Tanzimat's efforts to create a centralized bureaucracy, codified laws, and secular educational institutions left an imprint on the administrative and legal cultures of many Arab successor states.64 While these states later developed their own national systems, often under European colonial influence, the Ottoman-Tanzimat inheritance provided an initial layer of modern state structures. The secularizing trend initiated by the Tanzimat in law and administration was, however, met with varied responses and later re-Islamization movements in some Arab contexts.

# VIII. Historiographical Perspectives on the Tanzimat

The Tanzimat reforms have been a subject of extensive scholarly debate, with historians offering diverse interpretations regarding their nature, motivations, successes, failures, and overall significance.

## A. Debates on "Modernization" vs. "Westernization"

A central debate in the historiography of the Tanzimat revolves around the conceptual framework used to understand the reforms: were they primarily an indigenous effort at "modernization," or a process of "Westernization" driven by external models and pressures? Early scholarship, and some ongoing perspectives, often framed the Tanzimat as a period of Westernization, emphasizing the adoption of European laws, administrative structures, military techniques, and educational systems.3 The influence of European ideas stemming from the French Revolution, such as secularism and progress, is seen as a key driver.9 From this viewpoint, the Ottoman Empire was attempting to emulate the West to survive.

More recent scholarship, however, has offered critiques of this "Westernization" paradigm, arguing that it oversimplifies a complex process and often downplays Ottoman agency.4 These critiques suggest that "modernization" might be a more appropriate term, highlighting the Ottoman state's own internal goals of strengthening its administrative capacity, centralizing power, and ensuring imperial survival. While European models were undeniably adopted, this was often a selective and adaptive process, with Ottoman reformers choosing and modifying elements to fit their specific needs and context.1 The argument is that the Tanzimat was not merely about becoming "Western" but about becoming "modern" in an Ottoman way, which sometimes involved synthesizing Western forms with indigenous traditions (e.g., the Mecelle).37 Some scholars also point out that the discourse of "reform" itself was sometimes a European-influenced narrative adopted by Ottoman elites to justify state-strengthening practices.9

The term "Europeanisation" is also used, particularly in the context of urban transformations, to describe the adoption of European cultural elements, technologies, and planning principles.19

## B. Ottoman Agency vs. European Imposition

Closely related to the modernization/Westernization debate is the question of agency: were the Tanzimat reforms primarily driven by Ottoman reformers responding to internal needs and articulating their own vision for the Empire's future, or were they largely imposed by European powers pursuing their own interests?

Traditional narratives sometimes leaned towards the "European imposition" view, emphasizing the role of diplomatic pressure, military threats, and economic leverage by Britain, France, and Russia in compelling the Ottomans to enact reforms, particularly those benefiting Christian minorities or opening the Ottoman economy.3 The timing of key edicts often coincided with moments of Ottoman diplomatic vulnerability, lending credence to this interpretation.3 However, a significant body of scholarship now emphasizes Ottoman agency, highlighting the

active role of reformist statesmen like Mustafa Reşid Paşa, Âli Paşa, Fuat Paşa, and Ahmed Cevdet Pasha.1 These scholars argue that while European pressure was a factor, the primary impetus for reform came from within the Ottoman elite, who recognized the Empire's dire situation and sought to implement changes necessary for its preservation and revitalization.1 The reforms were thus a product of Ottoman decision-making, even if they involved borrowing from foreign models. This perspective views the Tanzimat as an Ottoman project of state-building and self-strengthening in a challenging international environment. The "social willingness to inherit elements of European culture, technological innovations, and lifestyle" is also cited as an internal driver.19 Revisionist analyses also explore the Tanzimat and the Arab Nahda not as separate movements solely under Western influence, but as interconnected components of a broader "Ottoman modernity" involving cultural experimentation and hybrid identities.132

## C. Varying Interpretations of Success, Failure, and Overall Impact

There is no scholarly consensus on the ultimate success or failure of the Tanzimat reforms. Interpretations vary widely depending on the criteria used for evaluation and the specific aspects of the reforms being considered.

Some historians argue that the Tanzimat, despite its shortcomings, was a crucial period of transformation that laid the foundations for the modern Turkish Republic and other successor states.1 They point to successes in centralizing the administration, creating a more modern military and bureaucracy, establishing secular education and legal systems, and introducing modern infrastructure.1 From this perspective, the Tanzimat succeeded in significantly strengthening the Ottoman central state, at least temporarily, and initiated irreversible changes in Ottoman society.8 It is argued that the Tanzimat ensured the Empire survived as an active power for several more decades, avoiding immediate colonial subjugation unlike some other non-Western states.7

Other scholars emphasize the failures and negative consequences of the Tanzimat. They argue that the reforms failed to solve the Empire's fundamental problems, such as economic decline and nationalist separatism.2 The massive foreign debt incurred during this period led to financial bankruptcy and increased European control over Ottoman finances.2 The

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